



Two N.C. Republicans draw fire for 'outrageous' ethnic comments

By PAT MORRISON

Congressional colleagues and several minority groups have blasted recent comments made by two North Carolina House Republicans, Sue Myrick of Charlotte and Howard Coble of Greensboro. Coble's comments came in an early February radio talk show, in which he defended President Franklin D. Roosevelt's decision to intern Japanese-Americans in concentration-camp-style settings during World War II. Myrick caused a stir for her remarks about Arab-Americans.

While Coble rejected a caller's suggestion that President Bush similarly intern Arab-Americans, he said FDR's now-criticized move was one that actually protected Japanese-Americans in a wartime climate of fear and intolerance. While Japanese-Americans posed no threat, Coble said, Roosevelt's decision protected national security. According to a report of the talk show in the Associated Press, Coble added, "Some [Japanese-Americans] probably were intent on doing harm to us -- just as some of these Arab-Americans are probably intent on doing harm to us."

Myrick, speaking on a potential link to Arab-Americans and global terrorism, said in her talk, "Look who runs all the convenience stores across the country." Later, after several Arab-American groups protested her comments, Myrick said she only wanted to remind communities of the real threat of terrorism, including "the illegal trafficking of food stamps through convenience stores for the purpose of laundering money to countries known to harbor terrorists." To date, despite accusations, there have been no substantiated cases of illegal food stamp commerce in the United States linked to terrorism.

The comments of both North Carolina representatives met almost immediate criticism. Floyd Mori, president of the Japanese American Citizens League called Coble's comments "outrageous" and "uneducated." Noting that the U.S. government recognized and apologized for the error of interning its own citizens 60 years ago, Mori said Japanese-Americans "expect Representative Coble to do so as well." The U.S. government issued a formal apology for the internment camps in the late 1980s and offered compensation to about 60,000 survivors. Following Mori's statement, three Asian-American members of Congress -- Reps. Robert Matsui, D-Calif.; Mike Honda, D-Calif.; and David Wu, D-Ore. -- on Feb. 7 requested a meeting with Coble.

Myrick's and Coble's comments were reported in a daily briefing issued by the Washington-based Council on Islamic-American Relations, which urged the Republican Party to formally condemn both lawmakers' remarks about Arab-Americans.

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